LEARNING ENGLISH INDEPENDENTLY THROUGH SOCIAL MEDIA DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

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Abstract

This study is aimed at investigating students' independent learning through social media during the COVID-19 pandemic situation. The research involved the first-year students of the English Education Department of a private university in Jakarta. They were chosen purposively. To answer the research questions, a qualitative approach was employed. Data were obtained from the questionnaire, which was distributed via Google Form, and semi-structured interviews. The results of this study show that students are learning English independently during the COVID-19 pandemic by using social media. Although they usually use social media for social networking, they are aware that social media can be used for improving their English skills without any instructions from the teachers. However, there are challenges in learning English independently through social media. It can be concluded that students can use social media to learn English but students' self-directed learning needs strong motivation to start and to be consistent.

Keywords: *Independent Learning, Social Media, English skills*

INTRODUCTION

Cases of the spread of COVID-19 throughout the world have a significant impact on various sectors, one of which is the education sector. To control the spread of the COVID19 virus, the government issued a policy that all indoor and outdoor activities in all sectors were temporarily suspended, especially in the education sector. Due to this pandemic, many schools and colleges have been forced to temporarily close. With the closure of schools and colleges in every country in the world, including in Indonesia, learning that should be done face-to-face is now set to become online-based learning. Pandemic COVID-19 has forced students to learn from home with or without control from the teachers, parents, lecturers.

Online learning is a learning activity that is more student-centered, more innovative, and even more flexible. Online learning can be defined as "a learning experience in a synchronous or asynchronous environment using different devices with internet access (Dhawan, 2020). In online learning, students can freely determine the time and place where the students are ready to carry out this activity. With online learning, teachers and students can access various kinds of learning materials in order to increase their knowledge from any platform such as social media. In addition, online learning tools are not only useful for distributing learning content, but also for developing skills that help drive job success,

such as digital literacy, professional behavior, and independent learning (Levy, 2017).

On the other hand, the shift from high school to university and from directed learning to independent learning may be a problem that freshmen often face. They are required to be able to adapt again to the new environment. Especially when all lecture activities are held online which prevent them from interacting and communicating with their new environment. The move to distance learning abruptly brings many changes related to the student learning environment, finances, social connections, motivation, and health behaviors (Gonzalez-Ramirez, J. et al., 2020).

Students might find it difficult to build their knowledge if they only study the materials provided by the teachers/lecturers. Inevitably, students must have the will of themselves to start independent learning, so self-regulation is also needed. They must become independent learners who are highly motivated to spend time effectively preparing, nurturing, managing, and reflecting on their learning and participation (Gonzalez & Louis, 2018). If students do not have the will to do independent learning in this difficult era, then the learning process will not work as it should be. Students will be left behind a lot of material that allows ineffectiveness in teaching and learning activities.

In English language learning, the concept of independent learning might also refer to as autonomous learning. It might also defined as

self-directed learning. Self-directed learning is learning in which the conceptualization, design, conduct, and evaluation of a learning project are directed by the learner. This does not mean that self-directed learning is highly individualized learning always conducted in isolation. Learners can work in self-directed ways while engaged in group-learning settings, provided that this is a choice they have made believing it to be conducive to their learning efforts. According to Nezif Ibrahim (2015, major challenges of independent learning include a lack of authentic resources, a lack of learning goals, a lack of confidence, high reliance on teachers, a lack of practice in self- and peer assessment, a lack of motivation, and a lack of learning strategies.

Independent learning can be accessed from social media. Social media is an online platform that many people use to build social networks or social relationships with other people who have the same background, activities, career interests, or real-world relationships. According to Surahman (2020, as cited in Thaariq, 2020), social media can be accessed from anywhere, at any time, and by anybody who is connected. It is increasingly clear that social networking has become a part of people's lives, including students' lives. Social media can be used as learning resources. Types of social media include microblogs, wikis, social networking sites, photo and video sharing sites, instant messages, podcasts, widgets, cyberspace, and much more (Akram & Kumar, 2017). More than just a technical facilitator, online social media platforms also function as a technological, economic, and socio-cultural framework for managing online social traffic (Gillespie 2010 as cited in Van Dijck & Poell, 2018). Social media platforms are useful for students to have conversations, share information, and create web content. The students might start their day with social media and they might also use it as a nevermiss thing in their daily life.

The use of social media can make the learning process easier especially for students of English education. Through social media, they are required to learn independently and students can actively be more creative and independent.. Self-directed learning through social media enables individuals to improve their English skills. According to Al Arif (2019), students' English skills can be improved through the use of social media, with sub-themes improving as well. Reading ability, speaking ability, pronunciation, grammar, and vocabulary are all important. In the meantime, new students are experiencing a transition period from high school to university and from directed learning to independent learning, especially during the pandemic. As explained

in the study of Reotutar (2020) the new students could not fully survive and were not ready with the online learning platform recommended by the university. By interviewing the respondents, the researcher found that only two students were familiar with using Google Classroom because they had used it at their school before. In contrast, the results of research conducted by Fearnley & Malay (2021) found out that all the respondents have the same readiness for online learning. But the significant differences could be seen concerning academic programs and duration of internet use which can affect student motivation in readiness for online learning independently. This study aims to find out whether students learn English independently through social media during the COVID-19 pandemic. The specific purpose of this study is to find out if students of a private university in Jakarta use social media to learn English independently. Research questions addressed in this study were:

a. Do students learn English through social media?
b. What social media platforms do students use to learn English?
c. How do they learn English skills through social media?

METHOD

The method used in this research was a qualitative approach. The population of this research was 32 participant of the first-year students of the English Education Department of a private university in Jakarta, Indonesia. Researchers used purposive sampling involving students who were carrying out online learning amid the covid19 pandemic. The research instrument was a questionnaire that was distributed through Google form and semi-structured interviews, the interviewees were randomly selected. Data collection was conducted on November 2021. The questionnaire contained 19 items, as an open-ended questionnaire. Data analysis in this research used thematic analysis by analyzing participant responses. Thematic analysis is an effective method if a study intends to examine in detail the qualitative data held in order to find the linkage of patterns in a phenomenon and explain the extent to which a phenomenon occurs through the eyes of the researcher (Heriyanto, 2018)The analysis was to find out whether they were learning English independently by using social media during the Covid-19 pandemic. the data was analyzed and described to get answers to questions.. Afterward, the researcher interviewed the students by using Google Meet.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The results of this study provide information to answer the research questions. Based on the questionnaire and interview, the responses show that the English Education students learn English independently through social media during the covid-19 pandemic.
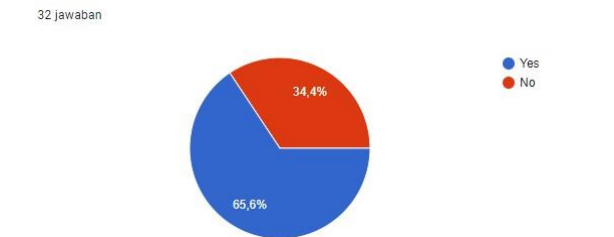It can be seen from figure 1 below.

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Figure 1. Student responses to learning English independently using social media during the Covid-19 pandemic. Based on figure 1, 21 out of 32 students are doing independent learning amid the Covid19 pandemic while the rest of the students are not learning independently.
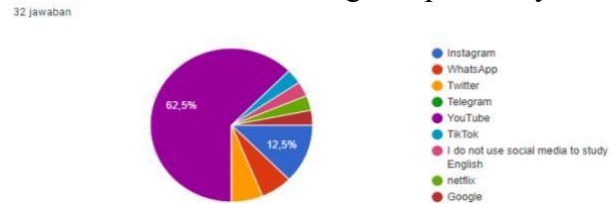

Figure 2. Types of social media platforms that students use during the Covid-19 pandemic
The second research question is about the social media platform used by the students. During the Covid-19 pandemic, most of the students use YouTube as the learning tool to study English independently (62.5%). According to the students' responses, YouTube is a platform that provides various learning materials. This is in accordance with the results of research conducted by Wang & Chen (2020) which shows that most students use YouTube to watch English-teaching videos for learning purposes. In addition, during the interview the students also learn English from Twitter, Netflix and Instagram
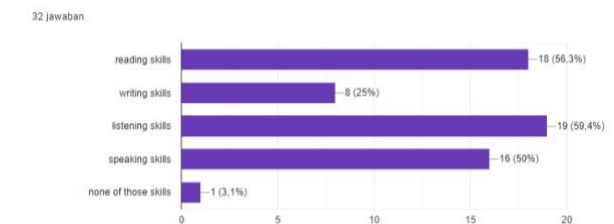.

Figure 3. Various kinds of skills that students acquire when doing independent learning. The third research question addresses how the students learn English skills through social media. From the diagram 3, it shows that most of the students are learning English through listening the Youtube video. They

mentioned that it is also to improve their listening skills (59,4%). Besides, they also build other skills such as reading skills (56,3%) and speaking skills (50%).
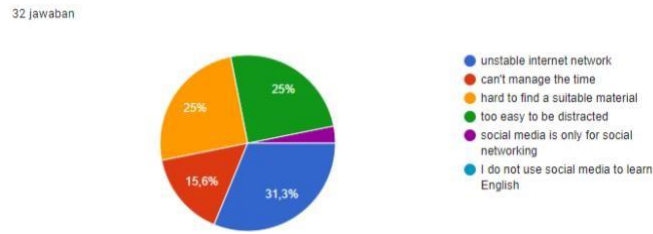

Figure 4. Challenges faced by students during learning English independently using social media
From those findings, it is implied that the students'   independent   learning
has successfully improved their English skills. However, when they were asked about the challenges, they mentioned several issues such as unstable internet network, cannot manage the time, hard to find a suitable material, too easy to be distracted, only for social networking and do not use social media to learn eanglish. The biggest challenge fJaced by the students during learning English independently using social media is the unstable internet network when they learning English independently using social media. It is commonly known that to access Youtube and other social media platforms, students need a stable connection.

The results of the study show that learning English independently can be done with various social media platforms. This is a good way of learning because there are many advantages to using social media. According to Erzad & Suciati (2018), one of the positive values of social media is that various articles or papers are distributed through social media and it can be a learning tool for students. With the variety of materials provided on the internet, it can make it easier for students to study independently anywhere and anytime, more flexibly and relaxed. It is also found that the most improved Eglish skills are reading and listening skills because the materials are mostly in the form of text and videos.
It is implied from the findings that the use of social media can make the learning process easier especially for students of English. Self-directed learning through social media enables individuals to improve their English skills. Social media platforms are useful for students to have conversations, share information, and create web content.

Students can work in self-directed ways while engaged in group-learning settings. Students

must have the will of themselves to start independent learning so self-regulation is also needed. Even so, independent learning using social media also requires a strong motivation to start and to be consistent

CONCLUSION

It can be concluded that the students learn English independently through social media during the covid-19 pandemic. They learn English through social media platforms such as Instagram, Whatsapp, Twitter, Telegram, Youtube, Tiktok, Netflix, and Google, For the first-year university students, learning English independently might need strong motivation and face challenges to the new situation. The challenges include unstable Internet connection, time management, difficulty to discovering appropriate content, and too easy to be sidetracked. However, social media can be an easy way of self-directed learning. By learning independently, students might improve their English skills including reading, writing, listening, and speaking. . The research shows that independent learning through social media provides positive feedback on the growth of target language usage, such as English but it needs strong motivation to start. Things to keep in mind are to not get too carried away with social media, as this will cause you to become addicted and lose focus on learning the target language.

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